

Appl. No. : 09/817,535
Filed : March 26, 2001

CLAIM AMENDMENTS

1. (canceled)
2. (canceled)
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21. (canceled)
22. (canceled)

23. (new) A computer-assisted method of reducing an inventory cost associated with product distribution and facilitating a transfer of purchases to consumers, the method comprising:

on a computer system, for each of a plurality of consumers:

associating a plurality of items with each other, wherein each of the items is ordered by the consumer from a different one of a plurality of merchants;

identifying a temporary storage facility proximate the consumer, from which the plurality of items can be transferred to the consumer;

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identifying a date and time for transferring the plurality of items to the consumer;

on the computer system, for each of the plurality of merchants:

estimating a transportation time for each of the plurality of items ordered by each of the consumers from the merchant to be transported to the identified temporary storage facility;

based at least on the estimated transportation time and the selected date and time for transfer, synchronizing a shipment of each item from the point of origin to the respective identified temporary storage facility in accordance with a just-in-time schedule compatible with the identified date and time for transferring the plurality of items to the respective consumer; and

for each consumer:

receiving the associated items at the identified temporary storage facility;

based at least on the association of the items on the computer system,

physically aggregating the items at the identified temporary storage facility; and

transferring the aggregated items to the consumer.

24. (new) The method of Claim 23, wherein each of the plurality of items are associated with each other indirectly through an association of each item with the consumer ordering the item.

25. (new) The method of Claim 24, wherein each of the ordered items is a product or comprises one or more products.

26. (new) The method of Claim 25, wherein identifying a temporary storage facility proximate the consumer, further comprises:

presenting to the consumer at least one temporary storage facility proximate the consumer at which the consumer can receive the items;

obtaining from the consumer a selection of one of the temporary storage facilities;

and

notifying the merchants of the identity of the temporary storage facility selected by the consumer.

27. (new) The method of Claim 26 wherein identifying a date and time for transferring the plurality of items to the consumer, further comprises

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receiving from the consumer, an identification of a date and time at which the consumer will expect to receive the items.

28. (new) The method of Claim 27 wherein on the computer system for each of the plurality of merchants, said synchronizing further comprises:

associating the items ordered by the plurality of consumers from the merchant in a plurality of groups whereby the items in each group are destined for the same temporary storage facility and have similar dates and times for transferring the items to the respective consumers; and

based at least on the estimated transportation time and the selected date and time for transfer, synchronizing the shipping of the items in each group from the point of origin to the respective identified temporary storage facility in accordance with a just-in-time schedule compatible with the identified date and time for transferring the items to each of the respective consumers.

29. (new) The method of Claim 28, further comprising

providing each merchant target shipping dates, times, and schedules for the items in each group, compatible with the identified date and time for transferring the items to each of the respective consumers.

30. (new) The method of Claim 29, further comprising

providing each temporary storage facility:

an identification of the shipping schedule of each group of items destined to that facility;

an identification of the items in each group; and

aggregation instructions to aggregate the items in the groups received in accordance with the association of items in the computer system for each consumer.

31. (new) The method of Claim 30, wherein transferring the aggregated items to the consumer comprises

having the consumer pickup the aggregated items at the temporary storage facility.

32. (new) The method of Claim 31, further comprising

reminding the consumer of the scheduled date and time to pickup the aggregated items at the temporary storage facility.

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33. (new) The method of Claim 30, wherein transferring the aggregated items to the consumer comprises

 sending the aggregated items to the consumer from the temporary storage facility.

34. (new) The method of Claim 33 further comprising

 instructing a delivery service to pick up the aggregated items at the temporary storage facility and to deliver the aggregated items to the consumer.